1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

Ethiopia. The uplands, even though they lie close to the equator, are pleasantly cool at night during the long dry season, and abundant monsoon rains from the Indian Ocean pour down between June and September. 7 132

Rainfall averages approximately 47 inches annually at Addis Ababa[1] and considerably more in the area around Lake Tana. An average of 81% of the rain falls during the three-month rainy season, and about 13% during the irregular light rains in April and May.[2] The water-table remains high during most of the dry season, even when most rivers have dried up, so that irrigation and terrace farming are possible. Both have been practiced, though neither extensively nor intensively, since ancient times. [312]

The Amhara divides the climatic year into the long dry season, Bälg, which lasts until the beginning of the "little rains", and the 3 to 4 month rainy season, kerämt, which the modern-educated Amhara translates as "winter". Terms subdividing these seasons differ locally, which is not surprising considering the extent to which climate is dominated by local topography. 184 805

While the long dry season is climatically monotonous, the rainy season is in daily, dramatic flux. It is the season of tornadoes, often dangerous. On a relatively dry day during the rainy season, usually in the early afternoon, a whirlwind (called Täro) may occur which can even 132

1. US Dept. of Commerce: "Ethiopia", OIT Vol.2, No.12, May 1947, 4 pp.
2. Hann, Julius: Handbuch der Klimatologie, 1908-1911, Vol.2, p. 181.

241 cereal, as well as other crops already mentioned are grown. The lowest and warmest spots of the plateau are usually used for various types of millet-sorghum, gesho (hops). Coffee grows wild or is purchased on the market, as are bananas from the lowland. After a few years of cultivation, a field may be left fallow for five or more years.

[171] The Amhara's irrigation and terrace farming resemble [462] those of Yemen, not of Africa. Farming is men's work, not [231] woman's. The one-handed plow is drawn by a yoke of two oxen, encouraged by a long fibre whip. The Amhara rerely uses other animals for drawing the plow.

Fallow land or new bush is broken during the dry season. A heavier-than-usual iron plow point is purchased from the Falasha ironsmiths, affixed to the scratch plow, and the area, after preliminary burning, is scratched many times at right angles. The stubble and weeds are then piled and burned. But for the actual plowing and seeding, the beginning of the rains is awaited.

● 312 Irrigation canals are completely washed out in the rainy season, and must be rebuilt in each dry season. Terracing is less common than irrigation, but on occasion mountain farmers of long residence do build low walls of rock and mud on hillsides to prevent severe washouts and landslides during the rainy season.

243 Tyeff (Eragrostic abyssinica; Poa abyssinica) deserves the latter Latin name, for it is the mainstay staple of Abyssinia, except in the south. It is an annual indigenous grass with seeds of pinhead size, cultivated

164 this is limited to occasional feasts due to the comparatively high cost of beef, and the "kosso" cure does seem to work. Dysentery kills many infants; amoebic dysentery sickens and kills adults also, especially near towns where the population is denser. The opening and increase in trade route communications since the Italian occupation has led to an increase in tuberculosis epidemics.[68]

312 164 Brooks, rivers and wells become increasingly more polluted as each dry season proceeds, and just after the flooding during the rainy season. Water carried long distances in skins is not safe either. The housewife, trying to manage as best as she can under the circumstances, carefully covers containers of food and drink, even of water stored overnight.

H. Mutual Aid

476 The simple living standard of the Amhara is somewhat improved by traits of mutual aid.

These may be listed in four categories, according to Amhara attitude:

(1) Mutual aid within the territorial or kinship unit, usually the hamlet;

(2) between neighboring hamlets that may or may not be kinfolk;

(3) within the religious sodality, the "mahabar";

(4) between individuals.

68. Simmons et al, Global Epidemiology, 1951. pp.62-73

796
795 On Easter, the Muslim worshippers of Saint Sheykh Abader leave Gondar town beginning at dawn, for a hill about half an hour's walking distance to the east, bringing with them about 100 live sheep, each donated by a faily. This is the hour when the Christians still feast on meat and beer. The hill is far enough away so that the rival religions do not annoy each other, but in the belief of the worshippers, the miracle of a water spring [312] will recur on this particular hill on this saint's day, despite the seasonal dryness which is then at its height making water a valuable and much desired commodity.

The Muslim men seat themselves on one side of the hill, the Muslim women, their hair covered with colorful red kerchiefs, on the other. Some erect shelters against the mounting sun. The men proceed to slaughter the sheep, away from the groups, with the formula "In the name of Allah the all-merciful and Muhammad his prophet". The meat is well roasted, then passed around in baskets, the pieces already cut to individual portions. There is plenty for everyone. There is also wheat bread ("qitta").

The Muslim leader meanwhile has proceeded half way up the hill, at a spot midway between the men and the women, and has begun to dig a hole about three feet deep. The water table is sufficiently high here so that muddy water begins to accumulate in the hole gradually. He digs another few inches, and more water accumulate. A half-gourd, sliced lengthwise, is brought and he reaches into the hole and begins to pass up the water. When the silt has settled in the bottom of the gourd, it is

3. Expressive Physical Arts.

531 Physical arts, like their material culture, are little developed among the Amhara, compared to their elaborate spiritual culture. If their life cycle gives any clue, it seems that the explanation lies at least in part in the end of free experimentation at the onset of adolescence, after which the experimentation is fettered into lines ordained by the Coptic church. Especially fine art, is considered exclusively within the domain of the church. This leaves little beyond body care and ornamentation for expression of physical arts, and even [302] this is partly dedicated to religion, such as the rationalized plucking of pubic hair of the woman, and the fullest expression of body arts on the occasion of church festivals.

171 It is also interesting to observe how patterns of the Middle East and of Africa are so evidently drawn from and synthesized in the traditional Amhara pattern of expressive physical arts, particularly in body care and ornamentation.

A. Body Care and Ornamentation.

515 [312] Washing in the dry season is difficult, since water is scarce and there are no wells. However, with some little effort, water can even then be obtained by digging in the riverbed, since the water table is high; this is what travellers do. Near towns the latter effort develops into a business, for water carriers, employing women as cheap labor to carry the water in their clay pots uphill to the town, charge 5¢ [548] (Ethiopian) per potfull of water. Only the "unattached woman" who has a cash income from beer-brewing or temporary wife - prostitution, can afford this, and usually buys a potfull of this muddy water every day during the long dry season, to wash herself and her clothing regularly and frequently, at a time when the fully respectable Amhara housewife goes unwashed (except for hands and private parts). Divorcees looking for husbands and professional women alone feel the need for daily

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

his early twenties, he found his way back to Ankober and assumed his rights as king of Shoa.

Menelik, who was a restless and imaginative character as well as a great soldier, soon began the series of vast conquests in the southern Galla lands which were to double the size of Ethiopia. It is therefore not surprising that he should have abandoned Ankober in favour of a capital within easier reach of his newly acquired territories. He first reverted to Debra Berhan, then made a new temporary capital at Liché, a few miles to the north-east. Here, at one end of a long, low hill are various remains of massive dry-stone walls as at Angolala, and the raised platform, only about 20 feet across, on which stood Menelik's personal dwelling. But the site is now uninhabited. In the 1880's Menelik, his southern conquests rapidly extending, moved his capital south-westwards to Entotto, in the midst of country newly retrieved from the Gallas. This was a magnificent site, 10,000 feet high and overlooking the plain and the splendid circle of mountains which form the setting of the present capital. Entotto was, however, unsuitable as the site of a permanent city. It is said, also, that Menelik's wife Taitu craved for a warmer residence and especially for the curative waters of the hot springs (the present Fil Wuha baths) on the edge of the plain below. So in 1889, the year in which he was crowned emperor in succession to John IV, Menelik moved down, and Addis Ababa was founded at the foot of the hills, 1500 feet below.

This digression completes our brief review of the historical associations of the area represented on the map. The remainder of this paper will deal with the present inhabitants, their distribution and their way of life.

It has already been said that the population of the area is greater than at first sight appears. The small, stone-built huts are inconspicuous objects, especially as they are seldom massed together to form a village but are widely scattered in small groups. Moreover the motor-road follows for the most part an exposed tract which carries less than the normal population. Travellers driving through therefore carry away a false impression: they can see little of the more populated areas, nothing of the gorges, and not a single one of the numerous churches of the region, except those of Debra Berhan itself.

I attempted to mark every inhabited place on the map. In very many cases the single dot indicates several households, and may be taken to represent, on an average, two households of five to six persons each or eleven souls. On this basis the population of the whole area of 102 square miles comes to about 15,500 or 152 per square mile—a high average by African standards. (This excludes Debra Berhan itself which would add a further 2000 or so.) The population is not, however, evenly distributed, and the area may be divided into three parts which, with their areas and population densities (again ignoring Debra Berhan) are as follows:

General plateau: 60 square miles—116 per square mile.

Plateau between or within 1 km. of gorges: 22 square miles—240 per square mile.

The gorges themselves: 20 square miles—162 per square mile. (This indicates a very high concentration on the "shelves" and a few other favoured spots, for a great part of the gorge area is, of course, uninhabitable.)

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

for, and, in the height of the rains when some crops are already up, deep furrows are made at regular intervals, and enlarged from time to time to carry away the surplus rain water.

Irrigation on the shelves of the gorges has already been referred to. But a more elaborate system, the extent of which is shown schematically on the map, has been developed along the river Beressa and its tributary the Maka, which both provide a small flow of water throughout the dry season. The whole enterprise is an interesting example of concerted effort and communal organization—in neither of which are the Amharas usually believed to excel. Its object is to ensure an early crop of barley, to be reaped before the onset of the main rains in June.

The irrigation system has to be partly rebuilt every dry season for the dams, which are constructed of stones and heavy sods, are swept away in the rains. From each dam the water is led off into a well-established furrow, which is carried down in a divergent line from the river and sometimes cut out of the rock on steep scarps. From it minor channels, which can be opened or blocked at will, branch off to irrigate the intervening lands. There are however more complicated systems; thus the dam near Dilila feeds two irrigation channels, one on either bank of the river. The right-bank channel receives its water direct from the dam, that on the left bank by means of an aqueduct carried across the main stream just below the dam and likewise constructed of stones and sods. The flow is not sufficient to feed both at once, so that the water is excluded from one or other branch on different days of the week; while if rain happens to fall the whole system is switched off. The left-bank channel, after running almost parallel to the Beressa for nearly a mile and a half, has to cross obstacles in the form of two tributary streams. The second tributary crossed is a large one, and the irrigation channel, in order to maintain its level, makes a big loop upstream and is then carried over the tributary by means of another wall-like aqueduct 8 or 10 feet high.

During the latter part of the dry season the brilliant green crops of the irrigated area make a striking contrast to the brown and withered aspect of the surrounding countryside. The district (known as Atakilt or "garden") takes its name from this characteristic feature. There are other minor irrigation schemes on the plateau, as on the Dalecha river in the east and the Angolala river in the west of the sheet, but nothing on so large a scale or so elaborately organized as the Beressa system. The Atakilt plains also have historic interest as the scene of the battle, already mentioned, which resulted in the emperor Theodore's annexation of Shoa and the capture of young Menelik.

To conclude this brief account of the agricultural techniques of our area something must be said of terracing and its effect on the landscape. Nothing like the impressive and elaborate terracing practised in some eastern rice-growing countries is attempted in these parts. Many slopes are nevertheless unobtrusively terraced, both in the gorges and on the plateau, and it is not uncommon to see new terraces in process of formation. A wall (*gur*) is built on the lower side of the area selected for improvement, advantage being often taken of any natural flattening of the hillside. The *gur* has a vertical face on

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

312 the downward side but is sloped on the up-hill side and therefore triangular in section. The filling-up of the empty space behind the wall, to the new terrace level, may be partly accomplished by hand but tends to be left to nature. During the rains, especially on the steeper slopes, there is a continuous downward movement of soil, which is arrested by the terrace walls and the pockets above them gradually fill up. In the course of centuries an immense amount of simple terracing of this kind has been done, the effect being to accentuate the existing irregularities of the steeper slopes. The landscape has certainly been greatly modified in this way, but it is often impossible to tell at first sight whether a given feature is natural, or partly or wholly due to terracing. It is obvious that such terracing has not only provided additional acreage for agriculture but also served the useful purpose of saving many steep slopes from excessive erosion. In several parts of Ethiopia, including this area, I have seen slopes under cultivation which were so steep that the soil, when loosened and disturbed, would slide away downhill. At first sight one would suppose that such slopes must be completely denuded after a few seasons' rain. The fact that this does not happen is due, I believe, to the vast abundance of stones in these soils, every one of which acts as a minute barrier arresting the flow of water and silt. Nevertheless such slopes, unless terraced, clearly cannot survive indefinitely under cultivation.

443 [487] Surplus produce is brought in to the big weekly market at Debra Berhan which is both the commercial and the social centre of the whole district; all the main routes radiate from it. Every Saturday morning these routes are thronged with market-goers, who can be seen moving along in an almost continuous stream, the well-to-do mounted on mules, the majority on foot, some driving laden donkeys and pack-mules. The products of this countryside are few, and there is little food surplus, but some wheat and barley come to market, also eggs and chickens and a good deal of butter. Some honey (used in making the local mead or *tej*) comes in, and beeswax is collected for export. Firewood, a scarce commodity on the plateau, is carried in in quantity. *Gesho*, the fermenting agent, comes up from the gorges. There is plenty of earthenware, made on the plateau nearby. From the district of Menz to the north come excellent felt blankets and burnouses. Traders from farther afield bring salt from the desert, partly in the bars which used formerly to pass as currency, and raw cotton and spices from the eastern plains. Textiles and other imported goods now find their way to this market by lorry.

When, in the course of the afternoon, the market crowds begin to stream homewards, one may identify the few simple wares they have bought or bartered. Some have a bag or a bar of salt, some raw cotton for spinning or a piece of cotton cloth, some a fresh supply of coffee-beans, some a bottle of kerosene or a cake of soap. Many have acquired earthenware water-pots or [323] cooking vessels; the large round platters (*matad*) 18 inches across, on which [482] the local bread is baked, stand out conspicuously for they are always carried, for safety, on the head.

971 It still remains to describe the most potent of the influences which shape the life of the country-bred Amhara—that of the Church. The priests, of

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

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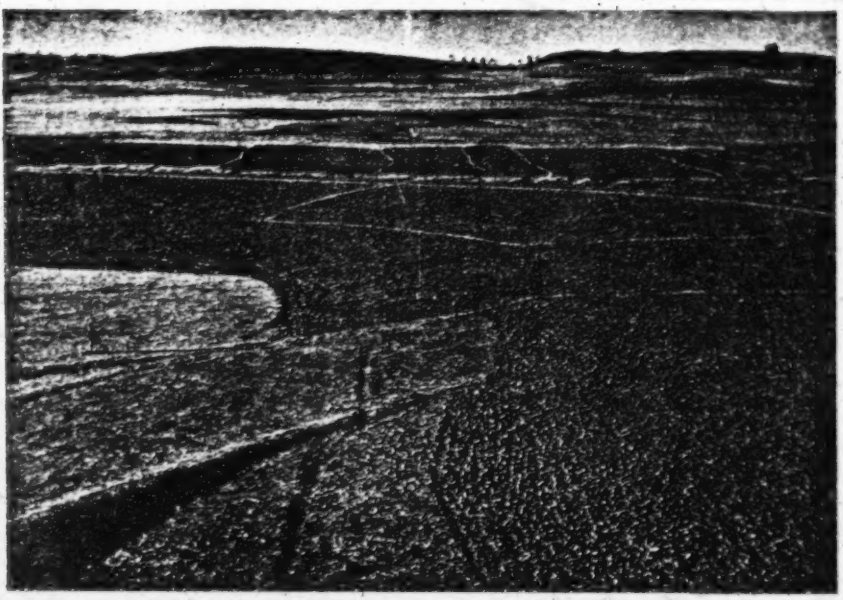

Irrigated land, Atakilt

The ceremony of Timkat (Epiphany), near Debra Berhan

[Facing p. 171]

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

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[End map II-A]

3: Buxton Y-5 (1946-1948)1949 MP5 Amhara MP5

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[End map II-B]

SHOAN PLATEAU
Buxton

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5

643 735 There are many royal farms belonging to the Prester, in which a great quantity of bread is gathered, which is given to honourable persons, and the poor, and to poor monasteries and churches, without Prester John making any profit of the produce and revenue of these farms, but only alms.

241 In all the country there is much bread, wheat and barley; in other lands there is more millet than wheat or barley, in these, and where wheat and barley, there is much taff and dagusha (seeds not known to us), pulse, beans, pease, and all vegetables; and in other lands all sorts of grain and vegetables in great quantity and abundance. There are 312 many water springs, but no fountains made of stone. In the town of Aquaxumo, where the Queens Saba and Candacia were, there are many wells and tanks made with good masonry.

532 In the town of Aquaxumo there are images very well made, and figures of lions and dogs, and oxen, and other antiquities made of stone. In this town Queen Candacia became a Christian by the advice of her eunuch, whom St. Philip baptized by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

491 [563] In all this country there is no bridge of stone or of wood; in no part of the kingdoms or lordships of Prester John are there Jews. There are infinite quantities of sugar canes, 137 and they do not know how to make it; grapes and peaches are ripe in the month of February and end in April: there are many oranges, lemons and citrons, and few pot herbs, because they do not plant them.

136 Animals, namely lions, ounces, tigers, wolves, deer, antas,[1] wild cows, foxes, lynxes,[2] wild boars, porcupines, civet cats, roedeer, gazelles, elephants, and other animals not known to us, of which the country is full, except two which I never saw there, namely bears and rabbits.

Birds, partridges of three kinds, like ours, other fowls

[1] *Anta* is a South American animal. [2] Probably hyænas.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

sea level. It is surrounded by three rings of high mountains, which afforded military protection in times past and today provide handsome scenery. Only toward the south is a direct land route alluring, as the ridge descends toward the fertile plains of Dambiyā and the waters of Ṭānā, largest lake in Ethiopia.

Because of its intermediate altitude, Gondar escapes the chill of higher regions and the intense sun of the lowlands: its climate is among the most pleasant in Ethiopia. Water is supplied by two streams—the Angarab and the Qīha—which enclose the town, then flow together down to Lake Ṭānā twenty-one miles away. Adequate rains throughout the year assure two, sometimes three, crops in the hinterland. Ṭēff and other grains, oilseed, honey, and livestock are produced in abundance.

TABLE 1

THE HOUSES OF GONDAR AND MANZ

Gondarine Emperors Who Ruled with Full Power		The Line of Independent Shoan Rulers		
Name	Dates of Reign	Name	Highest Rank Attained	Dates of Reign
Fāsil (Fāsiladas)	1632–67	Nagāsi (Nagāssē Kristos)	Abēto	169?–1703
Yohānnes I (the Pious)	1667–82	Sebstē (Sebstyānos)	Marīdāzmātch	1705–20
Iyāsu I (the Great)	1682–1706	Abbiyē	Marīdāzmātch	1720–45
Takla Hāymānot I	1706–8	Amhāyas (Amhā Iyasus)	Marīdāzmātch	1745–75
Tēwoflos	1708–11	Asfā Wassan	Marīdāzmātch	1775–1808
Yostos	1711–16	Wassan Sagad	Rās	1808–13
Dāwit III (the Singer)	1716–21	Sāhla Selassie	Negus	1813–47
Bakāffā (the Inexorable)	1721–30	Haile Malakot	Negus	1847–55
Iyāsu II (the Little)	1730–55	***		***
		Menelik II		
		As ruler of Shoa	Negus	1865–89
		As emperor of Ethiopia	Negusa Nagast	1889–1913

The population of Gondar approached seventy thousand during the city's time of power.[5] Thereafter it declined to but a few thousands. The townspeople of Gondar have been chiefly traders, priests, scribes, soldiers, artisans, and drink-house proprietresses. Like the inhabitants of Aksum, they are more conscious of Ethiopian history than people elsewhere in the country, as well they might be.

Gondar was founded by Emperor Fāsil about 1635. Legend says that he was inspired to plant his capital there because of a prophecy that Ethiopia would attain its greatest power if its capital were established in a place whose name began with the syllable *Go*. More practical considerations were surely